

**In Grave Danger:
How the United States Responds to Threats to the Nation through
Foreign Policy and Propaganda**

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An unconventional enemy requires an unconventional and often times new strategy to defeat it. The United States has been faced with these types of enemies several times in its history. Communism and terrorism are two of them. Before the beginning of the Cold War the United States had generally faced national threats that were clearly defined. In World War I the Germans were the opposition and in World War II it was the Nazis and the Japanese. These threats were defined groups of people in an identifiable location or region. Being able to define an enemy to a specific group of people and/or nation makes targeting, attacking and defeating that target easier to understand, especially to the American people. Targeting an ideology like communism or a small, scattered group of people like terrorists is much harder to explain and comprehend.

After an enemy has been identified and a new foreign policy has been created a third step must occur; the creation of a propaganda campaign. This propaganda is directed at foreign nations as well as at the American people. Propaganda can be defined as, “the construction and dissemination of certain words and images in order to shape the attitudes and behaviour of populations.”¹ Thus a government would use propaganda to spread its views in regards to their new foreign policy and in turn influence their targeted audience. Propaganda is typically spread through the media and the specific platform, whether it be radio, television, print media, or the internet depends upon the time period in question. However, no matter what sources are used to spread the propaganda the goal

¹ Philip Deery, “Propaganda in the Cold War,” *Social Alternatives* 23(2004): 15.

remains the same, to sway or influence the targeted audience. If the propaganda has been effective it will have created support for the government and its policies, particularly in a democracy like the United States. When the President is ready to commit the country to a challenge like war he can shape the public's attitudes to strengthen his support. Without propaganda the new foreign policy often cannot be implemented or used effectively.

Ideas about the use of propaganda by democratic governments have changed and evolved over time. In today's society propaganda is almost second nature as most people expect it especially during times of war. However, propaganda as a governmental tool has not always been so open. At the outset of the Cold War the idea that the United States government was actively trying to influence the way the American people thought was not commonly known.

In general it appears that scholars widely acknowledge that the government tends to use propaganda to control public opinion in such a way to not unnecessarily instigate war but to at the same time rally support for the U.S. when war is deemed to be the appropriate action. Steven Casey, in his article, "Selling NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-51," published in *Diplomatic History* in 2005 says, "Inside the foreign-policy establishment there was a widely held conviction that the popular mood was basically unstable, too prone to volatile oscillations between complacency and hysteria, withdrawal and engagement."² Thus the use of propaganda is not in question. What is being questioned is how to effectively use propaganda to get the reaction from the people the government wants. Beginning in the

² Steven Casey, "Selling NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-51," *Diplomatic History* 29 (2005): 662.

Cold War through today, propaganda use has been active in creating popular support for war as well as for new foreign policies. During the Cold War this propaganda effort was disguised to the public because the idea of government manipulation of the public was depicted as a tactic used by the enemy. “. . .the enemy conducts propaganda whereas democracies ‘tell the truth.’”³

Today, however, it is widely accepted that the Bush Administration and previous administrations have engaged in propaganda programs aimed at U.S. citizens. Nancy Snow and Philip Taylor wrote, “The Revival of the Propaganda State: US Propaganda at Home and Abroad since 9/11,” in 2006 published in the *International Communication Gazette*. In it they say, “when modern nations go to war, propaganda is a normal characteristic of their battle on the ‘information’ front, a fourth arm alongside military, naval and air campaigns.”⁴ Information is powerful especially as the world has become more modern. The modern world has made the access of information to the public very easy and if the government wants its voice to be heard they have to actively put out their opinion to the public. This acknowledgment led to the use of heavy propaganda aimed at gaining the support of the American people for whatever decision they wanted to make whether it be more military funding, the support of a new policy or even the decision to go to or escalate war.

During Truman’s presidency there was outright criticism by other political elites that he did not use propaganda enough to rouse the passions of the American people to go to war. In fact there was sentiment that, “. . .the administration’s whole Cold War

³ Nancy Snow and Philip Taylor, “The Revival of the Propaganda State: US Propaganda at Home and Abroad Since 9/11,” *International Communication Gazette* 68 (2006): 390.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 392.

strategy was distinctly lackluster.”⁵ Despite these claims, Truman’s administration did make attempts at stirring the American people. Dean Acheson, Truman’s Secretary of State, said, “we are faced with a threat not only to our civilization in which we live but to the whole physical environment in which that civilization can exist.”⁶ So although claims were being made against the Truman Administration about the lack of propaganda use, a strong effort was still being made to win the hearts and minds of the American people. The effort made by Truman and his administration created a new standard in American politics that will be used and criticized through the present day.

Nancy Snow says, “usually associated with the Soviets in the Cold War era, we now need to ask whether disinformation has become the deliberate policy of democratic foreign policy as now conducted by the US since 9/11.”⁷ During Truman’s presidency propaganda and creating a sense of urgency amongst the American people was not seen as a negative governmental practice. Rather, it was the preferred way to spread U.S. policy. Today this policy of propaganda is viewed as misleading. “The US administration is constitutionally forbidden from conducting any form of psychological warfare against the American people.”⁸ A shift has occurred in how scholars and the public feels about the use of propaganda by the government. During the Cold War propaganda was not given a second thought and was used whenever it was deemed necessary. Today, however, the government is highly criticized when the public discovers that it has been using propaganda to spread the ideas and policies of the government. Much of this shift of opinion is due to the fact that the Cold War has

⁵ Casey, “Selling NSC-68,” 674.

⁶ Ibid., 665.

⁷ Snow, “The Revival of the Propaganda State,” 398.

⁸ Ibid., 399.

provided an example of how propaganda can get out of hand i.e. the Red Scare and that the current American public is informed and feels that they should be allowed to make decisions for themselves after being provided all of the unbiased facts. Thus, the use of propaganda by government has not really changed but how the public views these efforts has shifted dramatically in favor of less government sponsored propaganda.

In comparing the actions taken by the U.S. government during two different wars, the Cold War and the War on Terrorism, the paper shows that when faced with an unconventional enemy, the President first creates a new foreign policy. Then he uses propaganda to create support for the policy and actions, including going to war.

Communism and terrorism are two different types of threats. Communism is a political ideology that was created by Karl Marx and is an economic model of how to structure society. The mission of the leaders in the USSR was to spread communism to all countries in the world. The United States came to view this agenda as a serious threat to the national security. A major factor for the U.S. was that after the end of World War II, the USSR occupied a large portion of Eastern Europe and it did not retreat from this territory after the fighting ended. Thus it appeared that the USSR was putting itself in an excellent position to spread its influence to Western Europe. This posed a serious rival for influence with the United States and so it fought the spread of communism as its number one priority.

Terrorism is not an ideology or a doctrine, in fact terrorism is a tactic of attack that is not strictly used by terrorists. Any group has the opportunity to use terrorism as a means of violent persuasion. Terrorist groups are present in a majority of countries around the world and yet are not related. They do not all have the same motivation and

goals defining their actions. Nothing binds these groups together like communism did during the Cold War. Also, terrorist groups do not represent an entire nation; instead, they are typically small groups of people with extremist views. There is no one definition of terrorism. In general terms terrorism consists of random acts of violence targeted at harming and/or killing innocents often with aims to make a political or religious statement.⁹ Terrorism had not dominated U.S. foreign policy until recently because terrorist attacks seldom occurred on U.S. soil. The few attacks that have occurred include an attempted bombing of the World Trade Center in 1997 and the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. On September 11, 2001, terrorists directly attacked the United States by crashing two U.S. airliners into the World Trade Center in New York City, another plane into the Pentagon, and a fourth plane into a field in Pennsylvania. These attacks brought the threat of terrorism to center stage and defeating this enemy became the most important task of the United States.

In both the cases communism and terrorism, the President designed a foreign policy to accurately combat the threat. The problem presented by both communism and terrorism is that they are not concrete, easily targeted enemies. Communists exist all around the globe as do terrorists. Creating a policy to defeat a global enemy was a somewhat new concept introduced during the Cold War. It would prove challenging to write a foreign policy because the policy would have to account for the fact that the United States would possibly have to go to war with many different groups of communists or terrorists respectively, in different locations across the globe. To deal

⁹Patrick Hayden, Tom Lansford and Robert P. Watson, eds., America's War on Terror, (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2003):110.

with such a global yet undefined threat both President Truman and President Bush came up with policy that addressed the respective issues.

Harry S. Truman inherited the presidency from Franklin D. Roosevelt when Roosevelt died unexpectedly. Roosevelt had not included Truman in his circle of trusted advisors and so when Truman took office he was unprepared. He knew little about the domestic policy agenda and more importantly the state of negotiations of U.S. foreign policy. In 1945 the U.S. saw the end of World War II and the beginning of a new type of warfare. Fresh out of the war the Soviet Union, under the direction of Joseph Stalin, announced its intentions to spread communism throughout the world. However, the Soviet Union did not elicit a response from the United States until 1947. By announcing that the USSR wanted to spread communism, the nation was also then announcing that it was vying for the position of becoming the only world superpower by eliminating U.S. presence throughout the world. Democracy and communism do not work well together and thus the struggle became the United States and democracy against the Soviet Union and communism.

Truman had to announce the political, economic, and military aims of his new foreign policy that would deal with the Soviet Union and communism. The Truman Doctrine was his new foreign policy and the critical policy within this Doctrine was the policy of containment.

In March 1947 the Soviet Union had threatened Greece and Turkey enough to garner the attention of the United States. Because of this incident, President Truman decided to announce his response to the Soviet threat of communism. Truman announced:

A new national policy to the Congress—and to the world. ‘I believe,’ he said, ‘that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free people to work out their own destinies in their own way. I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid.’¹⁰

This announcement was ground breaking because Truman stated that he planned on creating an entirely new policy regarding world threats and he was also committing the United States to formally counter the tactics of the Soviet Union. This announcement marked the first firm move against the USSR on the part of the new administration.

“The Truman Doctrine ‘identified America’s enemy and declared America’s allies, and staked Truman’s claim on history.’”¹¹ Much like World War II when all Americans knew that Germany and Japan were their enemies, Truman had singled out the Soviet Union and had labeled the enemy. Subsequently after the speech declaring the Truman Doctrine on March 12, 1947, Truman continued to make changes to U.S. foreign policy. Those changes were so effective that they remained in use until September 10, 2001. They include the creation of NATO in 1949 and the NSC-68 report written in 1950. These were major policies that would significantly change the role the U.S. played in the world.

The NSC-68 report states the objectives of both the Soviet Union and the United States, it addressed the military and economic capabilities of each nation, detailed the policy of containment, and finally addressed some situations that could possibly occur. The “NSC 68 recommended ‘affirmative’ containment, proposing to mobilize the U.S. to develop vast stores of atomic and conventional arms; build major military forces; forge a U.S. led alliance system; and foster extensive economic-military aid programs, covert

¹⁰ Robert P. Watson, Michael J. Devine, and Robert J. Wolz, eds., The National Security Legacy of Harry S. Truman (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2005): 52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

operations, and psychological warfare.”¹² This was a major step by the government to increase military spending. NSC-68 had its critics, particularly for appearing to be too militaristic. However in the end, it became very influential in how the President and his cabinet would proceed in the next few years.

In regards to using military means the report states, “the resort to force, internally or externally, is therefore a last resort for a free society.”¹³ The report goes into more detail as to why force should be considered a last resort. “The resort to force, to compulsion, to the imposition of its will is therefore a difficult and dangerous act for a free society, which is warranted only in the face of even greater dangers.”¹⁴ This is saying that the problem with going to war and using force is that it is easy to fall into doing the same thing that the enemy is attempting to do. By using force to impose the will of the U.S. and democracy on another country we are simply emulating what the Soviet Union is trying to do with communism. Due to this, Truman felt containment was a good policy because it did not forcefully impose the views of the United States on unwilling people as it left the choice to choose democracy up to the countries and their citizens.

Another point made by the NSC-68 report is that even if the U.S. chose to use force, it would only win the battle, not the war. The war to be fought was a war of ideas, a war of ideologies; communism versus democracy and enslavement versus freedom. This war of ideas was not limited to foreign nations. Truman had to fir for the support of the American people as well. “Resort to war is not only a last resort for a free society,

¹² Arnold Offner, Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War 1945-1953, (California: Stanford University Press, 2002): 366.

¹³ NSC-68, section iv, p.6

¹⁴ Ibid., p.6

but it is also an act which cannot definitely end the fundamental conflict in the realm of ideas.”¹⁵ Although NSC-68 had critics that complained it gave too much emphasis on military spending there was acknowledgment that in order to win this “cold war” more than military might would be needed.

Although the sentiments of NSC-68 were that war was to be the last option determining when all others avenues had been exhausted was up to the discretion of the President. Thus when the North Koreans invaded South Korea, with the help of the Chinese, the President brought the issue to the Security Council of the United Nations to develop a response. In this situation it had to be determined whether diplomatic means would be effective or if a military response was the correct response to the invasion. The containment policy was written in such a way that these types of decisions could be made without directly conflicting with the policy. This was up for interpretation with every conflict. The result of the UN Security Council meeting was a resolution that, “determined that the military action of the North Koreans constituted a breach of the peace.”¹⁶ From this resolution President Truman and his cabinet felt it gave the United States the authority to send troops to Korea to help the South Koreans.

Truman created some lasting policies during his time in office, “. . . the Truman administration established the precedent that the UN would serve as the venue for authorizing military force in the international arena to respond to the invasion of one state by another.”¹⁷ In fact Truman was the first president to use an UN resolution to authorize a military action. However, Truman was also the first president to commit troops in a

¹⁵ Ibid., p.7

¹⁶ Arthur V. Watkins, “War by Executive Order,” The Western Political Quarterly, 4 (1951): 541.

¹⁷ Ibid., 142.

foreign country without first gaining approval from Congress. When the UN Charter was presented to Congress questions of authority arose regarding the role of Congress in regards to authorizing war or military action. Numerous reassurances were given by President Truman as well as his top cabinet members that Congress would absolutely be consulted and in order to declare an official state of war Congressional approval would be needed.¹⁸ The loophole of this situation was that Korea and other subsequent wars were not declared wars but were most commonly referred to as military actions. This was portrayed as an underhanded way to commit the U.S. to unofficial war without having to gain consent of Congress.

If the military action in South Korea had turned out well and the Chinese had not intervened Truman would have more than likely been praised rather than criticized for his decision to invade Korea. Unfortunately for Truman Korea turned out to be a disaster and as he failed to get the approval of Congress to invade, Congressmen were able to use this decision against the President. They used their own propaganda to paint a picture of Truman that was reckless and careless. The decision of Truman and his administration to aid South Korea became their downfall because it appeared that Truman was making decisions outside of his authority and his opponents exploited these decisions. Truman was made to look unpredictable and potentially very dangerous. Consequently at the same of his failures in Korea Truman began to lose domestic support and his approval ratings began to drop substantially. With his numbers so low, Truman decided against running for a third term. This is an instance where propaganda was used against the administration to condemn the President for his actions. Propaganda has the ability to

¹⁸ Watkins, 546-547.

work for and against the government.

The policies that Truman created during the first years of the Cold War were new to U.S. foreign affairs. Containment did not resemble anything in foreign policy that had previously existed. One of the main reasons for this new outlook on foreign policy was the type of threat it was responding to. The Soviet style of communism was unlike anything the United States had encountered before and it required a new type of response. Containment was this response.

To accompany it an official propaganda program was enacted to combat Soviet propaganda that was being created and spread by the Soviet Union. “The legalization of the first peacetime propaganda program in the United States grew out of a combined effort between the Truman Administration and Congress.”¹⁹ The Truman Administration was not hiding the fact that propaganda was to play an integral part in the execution of its policy. However, propaganda was explained in a new way. The administration claimed that, “the Soviet government. . . launched a new kind of war--a ‘war of words’--that threatened the U.S. government and the future of democracy.”²⁰ The use of propaganda was therefore a tactic being used as both an offensive and defensive weapon. Not only was the United States being pro-active in spreading the ideas of democracy, it was also defending itself from the lies told by the Soviets. The United States was being faced with a new type of enemy and a new type of war. This required not only weapons like guns but weapons like words.

Truman experienced several instances that intensified tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Korean War was one of these situations. This created, “the

¹⁹ Shawn Parry-Giles, The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955, (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002):12.

²⁰ Ibid., 15.

need for a more stepped-up propaganda program.”²¹ This program included overt as well as covert activities and these activities began to look more aggressive. While much of the propaganda was being spread to foreign nations, the American people still felt the effects of this campaign through American media sources. A genuine fear of communism and communists existed in the United States. “To keep up with the constantly evolving saga of the Cold War, most Americans were obliged to rely on information provided by a combination of the day’s mass media: newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, and movie newsreels, along with the occasional book.”²²

Americans relied on their own media for information which was not necessarily unbiased. Sensationalism was common as can be seen in the titles of articles printed in popular magazines: “How to Spot a Communist”-*Look Magazine*, 1947, “Red Star Over the Middle East”-*The Saturday Evening Post*, 1947, “Does Communism Threaten Christianity?”-*Look Magazine*, 1948, “How U.S. Cities Can Prepare for Atomic War”-*Life Magazine*, 1950. The American people were being constantly bombarded with the idea that Communists were quickly closing in and that they posed a serious, imminent threat. They were also being told that the U.S. was up to the challenge of defeating the communists because democracy was stronger and better than communism.

The government felt that it needed to defend democracy and America to the outside world but they also realized that it was important the people within the borders of the United States actually believed the claims being made in their propaganda. And the government was successful because for the most part the American people believed, “that once foreign audiences received the ‘truth’ about democracy, they would rise up to reject

²¹ Ibid., 49.

²² Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture*, (California: Chronicle Books LLC., 2001): 62.

communism.”²³ The propaganda program that was created by President Truman started a pattern that would be used up to the present. However, the way that Truman used propaganda became more intense and aggressive as time went on and the presidency saw new Presidents.

The use of propaganda developed as a strategy during the Cold War. Truman did create a new foreign policy but it can be said that propaganda became a new type of domestic policy. Without public support a policy like containment is worthless. Containment allows for multiple wars at the same time in different areas of the globe, if needed. Selling an idea like this to the American people is hard because it requires total commitment from the United States in terms of weapons, money, and most importantly soldiers. If there was not a genuine fear of the enemy, war or military action would seem unnecessary to the public. What this meant for Truman and his administration is that they had to develop this fear and they found the best way to do this through propaganda. Propaganda allowed the government to reach the people in their living rooms and show them how threatening and scary communists were. Propaganda was used to control how and what the people felt and in reality it did work. “By the winter, McCarthy’s charges that the department [State Department] was full of Communists were clearly hitting the mark, with a recent poll finding that 64 percent of respondents believed that at least some of its officials were disloyal.”²⁴ McCarthy began what is known as the Red Scare, which turned into a type of paranoid panic about communist insurgents in America. McCarthy was able to use this propaganda against Truman and his administration to cast doubt. However exaggerated this Red Scare it was an effective propaganda campaign. What the

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Casey, “Selling NSC-68,” 685.

Truman Administration realized is that while propaganda was an effective tool in gaining and maintaining public support it also was easily turned and used against them. The Cold War kick started the idea of using propaganda as a domestic tool to manipulate, persuade and influence the American people. The use of propaganda in this way would continue through present day.

Communism was faced in the 1940s as new enemy and saw the creation of new policy and the use of domestic propaganda. A new enemy was once again seen in 2001 and it also required a new response. This time it was in the form of terrorism that targeted U.S. democracy. President Bush was faced with a new unconventional enemy after September 11, 2001. His foreign policy response was similar to Truman's as he also dealt with the idea of potentially going to war against an enemy in more than one country. Al-Qaeda is the terrorist group that attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. This organization was created during the end of the Afghanistan war against the Soviets. Osama bin Laden, the now infamous leader of al-Qaeda, did much of his recruiting from the men that came to fight in Afghanistan. These soldiers were ironically trained and armed by the CIA. Bin Laden "used his wealth and Saudi donations to build Mujaheddin projects and spread Wahabbism amongst Afghanis."²⁵

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, President Bush and his cabinet responded quickly. On September 15, 2001, Bush arranged a meeting of his top advisors at Camp David to make a decision about what should be done. "On September 17, 2001, President Bush signed a top secret plan for the war in Afghanistan that also contained a

²⁵ Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 132.

direction for the Defense Department to plan for a war with Iraq.”²⁶ The war with Iraq would not begin until 2003 but the war with Afghanistan was to start immediately. The war in Afghanistan would be one of the first wars the United States would commit to since the fall of the USSR and communism in 1991.

Up until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the policy of containment, created in 1947 by President Truman, was still in use. After the Soviet Union fell, communism no longer posed a serious threat to the United States, and so the United States scaled back its military operations in the world. The containment policy did not disappear, as there were still small communist countries around such as Cuba and North Korea, but it no longer occupied the forefront of foreign policy. “Absent a direct challenge to its national interest Washington will be more reluctant to assert its leadership in quelling dangerous conflicts.”²⁷ One explanation for this is that the United States only wants to commit its resources to another country if it feels genuinely threatened. After the fall of the Soviet Union the United States was essentially the world super power and did not feel that any country or group of people could actually threaten the safety and security of the United States. The domestic agenda became more important than the foreign one during the interim ten years between the fall of the Soviet Union and the September 11 attacks. Once the attacks happened, Bush was forced to assess the policy of containment and determine whether or not it could still be used. “The strategies that won the Cold War—containment and deterrence—won’t work against such dangers, because those strategies assumed the existence of identifiable regimes led by identifiable leaders operating by

²⁶ Richard S. Conley ed., Transforming the American Policy: The Presidency of George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism, (New Jersey: Pearson, 2001): 89.

²⁷ David Gergen, “America’s Missed Opportunities,” Foreign Affairs 71 (1991-92): 2.

identifiable means from identifiable terrorists.”²⁸ The change of enemy meant a change of policy also had to occur, according to President Bush.

The Bush Doctrine was the new policy created by the administration. It was revealed in a 2001 statement to Congress. In it President Bush said “from this day forward . . . any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”²⁹ What this doctrine did was allow for a policy that was very open ended in terms of defining what constituted supporting or harboring terrorism and then how to respond to this. This is similar to the vagueness of the Truman Doctrine in defining what an appropriate response is to containing communism and what type of approval a president must obtain before committing ground troops and military aid to a foreign country. One thing the Bush Doctrine did clearly, was to create an atmosphere of an *us* versus *them* mentality. If a nation was not with the U.S., they were automatically against it. To illustrate this mentality, President Bush designated what he called the “axis of evil,” which constituted Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as potential targets of the new foreign policy. President Bush named nations with which the U.S. would be willing to go to war. He accused each nation of either having weapons of mass destruction or attempting to create them. The United States was no longer on the defensive; it was on the offensive. Not just the “Axis of Evil” nations found this posture threatening.

The Bush Doctrine contains one very important policy which is preemption. “The Department of Defense’s Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms defines: preemptive attack [as] an attack initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that an

²⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 133 (2002): 51.

²⁹ Conley, 19.

enemy attack is imminent [and] preventative war [as] a war initiated in the belief that military conflict, while not imminent, is inevitable, and that to delay would involve greater risk.”³⁰ Preemption became the justification for going to war just as containment had been the justification for getting involved in military actions during the Cold War.

The attacks on September 11 were viewed by the administration as acts of war and this “was a departure from the established practice.”³¹ This was definitely a new view, because the president was saying that a private terrorist group had declared war on the United States. In previous instances of U.S. use of ground troops and strategic bombing the enemy was a clearly defined nation or segment of a nation such as the North Vietnamese in Vietnam. President Bush had just committed the U.S. to war with a group of people that had no fixed nation or place of residence. Al-Qaeda has terrorist cells all over the Middle East. This declaration left the door wide open as to where the United States could wage its War on Terrorism. What also complicated things was determining if al-Qaeda were responsible for the terrorists in a particular country such as in Iraq. Because terrorism is not an ideology but merely a tactic utilized, in this case by a group of Islamic fundamentalists of no specific nation, it is harder to pinpoint which group is which. In Afghanistan it was very clear that the Taliban and al-Qaeda had been working together and that Osama bin Laden did reside in the country. The war in Afghanistan is largely believed to be legitimate by the United Nations, American citizens, and countries across the globe. It appeared to be a measured response to the attacks in September. The broader interpretation of the War on Terrorism makes people more uncomfortable.

The war in Afghanistan was fairly quick in terms of destroying the Taliban forces

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ John T. Rourke ed., Taking Sides: Issues in World Politics, (Iowa: McGraw-Hill, 2006): 232.

and establishing a new, democratic government. However, the U.S. failed to capture Osama bin Laden and still has troops stationed in the country working on the recovery effort and combating pockets of resistance. Although the war in Afghanistan was declared to be over American soldiers continue to die in combat. Without the situation in Afghanistan cleanly finished, the United States began its second war against terrorism. This time it was in Iraq, one of the nations included in the axis of evil. Because of its inclusion in this “axis,” President Bush had essentially given pre-warning that a war with Iraq was completely possible. On March 19, 2003, this possibility became a reality when the United States bombed Baghdad and followed the bombing with a ground invasion the next day.³² On May 1, 2003 President Bush announced the “direct combat portion of the war was over.”³³ Again, like in Afghanistan, although the war was declared over the involvement of the United States was far from over in Iraq. In fact the death toll of American soldiers in Iraq continues to grow as each day passes.

The war in Iraq was done in the name of preemption. Douglas J. Feith, the U.S. undersecretary of defense, claimed “Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was a sadistic tyranny that developed and used weapons of mass destruction, launched aggressive attacks and wars against Iran, Kuwait, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and supported terrorists by providing them with safe harbor, funds, training and other help.”³⁴ Using this rationale according to the Bush Doctrine and its policy of preemption, the United States had the right to invade Iraq. The United States attempted to use the United Nations to help prove that Iraq did indeed have WMDs. Previous UN resolutions were enacted that required Iraq to

³² Conley, 94.

³³ Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Rourke, 234.

allow UN inspectors to come and search for evidence of WMDs or attempts to acquire WMDs. Iraq had not complied with these resolutions and the UN accordingly wrote resolution 1441 which says that the UN recognizes “the threat Iraq’s non-compliance with Council resolutions and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles poses to international peace and security”³⁵ However, this resolution does not recognize that the threat posed by Iraq is strong enough to declare war. However, President Bush did receive the approval of Congress to invade Iraq. With the approval of Congress and citing the above reasons, the Bush administration claimed they amounted to an imminent threat and called for a preemptive strike of Iraq. This decision put the policy of preemption to the test and with the use of governmental propaganda became popular with the American public.

When the U.S. will be able to pull its troops out of Iraq continues to be unknown with President Bush confirming this by saying that, “Setting an artificial deadline to withdraw would send a message across the world that America is a weak and unreliable ally. Setting an artificial deadline would send a signal to our enemies—that if they wait long enough, America will cut and run and abandon its friends.”³⁶ Thus the United States will remain in Iraq indefinitely and as each day passes more and more opposition is being heard abroad and at home.

A call for American patriotism and support was made by the Bush administration after the attacks on September 11th and the American people responded whole-heartedly. The war with Afghanistan saw much support considering the culprits of September 11th had their base in the country as well as the support of the Afghani government, the

³⁵ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1441, November 7, 2002, p. 1.

³⁶ George W. Bush, “National Strategy for Victory,” Vital Speeches of the Day, 72 (2005): 6.

Taliban. The war with Iraq was somewhat different. Americans would need to understand why war with Iraq was necessary.

Propaganda has played a big part in the War on Terrorism as it did during the Cold War. Once again

the American domestic media were fully 'on message' with the Bush administration in the war against terrorism, including full support for the war against Iraq. (Bennett 2003) It reproduced virtually uncritically the administration's agenda, including any misinformation about WMDs and the Al Qaeda-Iraq connection.³⁷

The media gave the Bush administration a different voice to use to reach Americans with. "The war on terror is essentially a global struggle for hearts and minds and the media are the principal channels for winning the argument, any deception activities are bound to be branded as disinformation."³⁸ Americans allowed themselves to be convinced of the policy line through the same source that was used during the Cold War.

Simple explanations and solutions were being used to explain the complex situation in Iraq. The war in Iraq is being portrayed as a fight between good and evil but in all reality it is a much more complicated and complex situation. Iraq is in a communal civil war according to Stephen Biddle. He states that a communal civil war "features opposing subnational groups divided along ethnic or sectarian lines; they are not about universal class interests or nationalist passions."³⁹ The Iraq war is being sold as a fight between good and evil and reality is very different from this simplistic explanation.

In the beginning of the Iraq War as well as during the War on Terrorism in general the propaganda program was very effective in gaining support for the foreign

³⁷ Nancy Snow and Philip Taylor, "The Revival of the Propaganda State" *International Communication Gazette*, 399.

³⁸ Snow, 400.

³⁹ Biddle, 4.

policy as well as for the decisions to go to war. However, since then a change has been seen. The problem that has occurred in Iraq is that promises made before war began were not fulfilled. The issue that arises by presenting simple explanations and solutions to Americans is that they expect quick resolutions with little loss of life. This does not happen because in reality, the situation is extremely complex and cannot be solved by simply invading, destroying, and leaving. This leads to a restless public, where people were promised results and quick results at that, and once this does not happen all the support that was generated before the war began quickly turns into doubt and dissent.

Two of the major claims of the Bush Administration concerning Iraq were that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein was directly linked to the terrorists that attacked the United States on September 11th.⁴⁰ These two assertions were powerful in swaying the American people. However, both of these claims have been proven false. It appears that the Bush administration used these ideas to create a sense of urgency and fear of Iraq and terrorists. Once the public began to realize that it had been lied to or deceived, support for the war began to wane. The length of the war and the growing number of casualties has also decreased the support for the war. Propaganda can be very effective in garnering support but if the propaganda is proved false by the same media sources that made the claims in the beginning the American public begins to question not only the new foreign policy but also question the President. As quickly as the support is won it can be lost.

The Bush administration has changed the meaning of terrorism “from a method to

⁴⁰ David Altheide and Jennifer Grimes, “War Programming: The Propaganda Project and the Iraq War,” *Sociological Quarterly* 46 (2005): 627.

a condition of the world,”⁴¹ and has thus created a new U.S. enemy. Much like during the Cold War propaganda was used to create support for U.S. actions and hate/fear of the enemy. Unfortunately, during both time periods the propaganda program that was used and the actions of the government were not the same and all of the support the President had before he went to war transformed into disillusionment and mistrust of the war, the government and the President.

The two policies have several similarities as well as differences. These are important in understanding the comparison of the two and how both policies require the use of propaganda and fear to be effective. One of the key differences between communism and terrorism is the goal of each. Communism, under the direction of the Soviet Union, was determined to spread to all countries in the world. And in order to do this the Soviet Union was willing to go to any lengths necessary, including war. Communism was an ideological enemy that became tangible when the Soviet Union attempted to spread it or the United States tried to stop its spread. The motivation of the Soviet Union is very different from that of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

The goal of al-Qaeda, under the direction of Osama bin Laden, is not necessarily to spread its extremist Islamic views to the entire world. Instead this group is interested in eliminating U.S. presence in the Middle East. By nature terrorists groups like al-Qaeda use violence to achieve their goals. This is different then the tactics used by the Soviet Union to spread communism. Much like the United States a campaign of propaganda was being used to influence other nations to turn to communism. Also economic as well as military aid was provided by the Soviet Union to smaller nations.

⁴¹ Altheide, 627.

The Soviet Union thought this aid would help in spreading communism to nations around the world through more peaceful means. Terrorists are violent and use violence as their only weapon. Communism during the Cold War did use violence on occasion but also relied heavily on other types of persuasion such as economic aid and the use of propaganda to spread their beliefs.

Besides the differences of the threats themselves the reaction of the United States and the Presidents also offers some differences. One of the most significant is the policy that emerged from each president and how it was used. President Truman first announced his policy of containment and then used it. President Bush on the other hand went to war with Afghanistan and then announced his policy of preemption. The policies themselves also contrast. Although they both enabled the U.S. to go to war or into a military action they did so in two different ways. "Preemption contrasts starkly with the non-aggressive deterrence doctrine that served both Washington and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Deterrence sought to prevent an attack by an aggressor, notably a nuclear attack, by threatening to retaliate."⁴² This marks a stark contrast between the policies and yet they both led the United States into military combat.

Finally while both administrations used propaganda the platforms were different because of the types of media sources that were available. President Truman did not have access to the television media and internet like President Bush does. This effects how quickly information can be spread.

Communism and terrorism are two different types of threats that have been dealt

⁴² Frederck H. Gareau, State Terrorism and the United States (London: Clarity Press Inc., 2004): 193.

with by the United States. What links these two threats besides the fact that they are or were at one time the number one enemy of the United States? The actions of the President and his cabinet provide several commonalities between the two.

One similarity is that both communism and terrorism resulted in the creation of a new foreign policy by the President. Truman and Bush viewed their respective threat as brand new requiring a new policy. The resulting policies would come to determine U.S. military actions around the globe. A characteristic of each policy is that they each remained vague so that interpretation would be needed in making a final decision. This vagueness allowed for both Presidents to commit the United States to military combat abroad. The policy of containment would be used several times to enter the U.S. into a military action in foreign countries such as in Korea and Vietnam. So far the policy of preemption has been used to enter the United States into war with Afghanistan and Iraq. Who knows how many other countries will be invaded using this policy.

As the United States invades countries to protect itself from either communism or terrorism it is only fighting battles, it is not possible to fight the war. In the case of communism the United States would have had to directly combat the Soviet Union and its army and arsenal of nuclear weapons. This would not have been feasible under the policies of President Truman because in doing so it could have led to nuclear war. Truman and the presidents who followed Truman were not willing to enter into a nuclear war. Thus containment allowed the United States to fight communism on a small scale. However, the enemy was not fully eliminated until the Soviet Union fell in 1991.

This same situation is happening with the War on Terrorism, although it is slightly different. The United States is fighting battles against terrorism in several

countries but even if the terrorists are defeated completely in Iraq and Afghanistan the U.S. has not won the war against terrorism. Terrorists exist in an undefined number of countries and in fact there is no guarantee that terrorism can ever be completely destroyed. This leaves the United States and President Bush the question of when does the War on Terrorism end? Before the Soviet Union fell the United States also had to ask the question, when will the Cold War end? Both President Truman and President Bush entered the United States into a war with no end.

Now that new foreign policies had been created a clear path to go to war was still not available. This is especially true during the Cold War because the policy of containment was in use for more than fifty years and thus war had to be justified and explained every time war became necessary in the eyes of the administration in power. Before a war could be waged the President had to have the support of the American people. A president must continually play the game of politics, especially in a democracy like the United States, because there is a continuous tug of war between the two main political parties. It would be political suicide to commit the United States to a war that was not supported by a majority of Americans. It would also go against what America stands for, a country governed in the name of its citizens. So before any military action to defeat the enemy can occur, the President must win the hearts and minds of the people. In order to do this a program of propaganda is implemented to help influence the American people as well as the rest of the world.

President Truman and President Bush have both used propaganda to help win support for their respective foreign policies. Propaganda plays a huge part in public opinion regarding actions of the government, the president and especially the decisions

made regarding war. Because both policies were created with the knowledge that public support would play a key role in regards to decisions concerning war propaganda was used as soon as the policy was created. The goal of a propaganda program is to maintain support from the public throughout the length of the policy. If this occurs when it is time to enter into a war it is easy to convince the public that war is necessary because they already understand the danger of the enemy. Thus when President Truman needed to rally support for the war with Korea it was relatively easy because the American people were already aware of the serious threat communism posed to the democratic way of life. Without support from the home front it would have been very difficult for either president to actually implement their new foreign policy and go to war. Thus propaganda was used in conjunction with the new foreign policy. Without an effective propaganda campaign the foreign policy would not have been as effective.

Both President Bush and President Truman were faced with an enemy that had not been faced before. This enemy was not confined to one place and did not use typical tactics to defeat their enemies. Each president had to create a new foreign policy that dealt with this new type of enemy. In their responses, both recognized that the United States might have to commit itself to war in many places across the globe when the need arose. Because the nature of these enemies were not entirely known, predicting how many wars must be fought to finally defeat them was hard to know. Thus, the need for a foreign policy that would allow for war at any time over a long period was created. After these policies were created, that allowed for interpretation as to when and where war should occur, the next step was to gain the support of the American people to go to war. In order to do this a propaganda program was implemented. During both the Cold War

and the current War on Terrorism, a genuine fear of the respective enemy was felt and support for the government was created. However, as quickly as the support for war was gained, it faded. Once results were not being seen, promises were not being fulfilled and American soldiers were coming home in body bags more frequently the support that was once so strong transformed into doubt.

What both the Cold War and the War on Terrorism have illustrated is a pattern of how unconventional foreign enemies are dealt with in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A foreign policy is created and a propaganda program is implemented to create support for the new policy and eventually for war. The new policy and the propaganda work together because without one another they are not effective.

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